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Introduction

When thinking about cross-cultural communication, problems of translation are immediately interposed. Translation does not simply involve the transmission of a message across languages. It is central to all communication. We never communicate directly: when we speak we are calling for an act of translation by the person we are addressing. These words I am writing will be received by each reader in a slightly different way. No one receives the exact message I wish to convey. Each interprets the words in ways that make sense to their own circumstances. A process of translation is even involved in my own construction of the language: I must give inchoate experience a form ordered by the English language. In writing I need to translate my ideas into a code I have learned and which is only inadequately able to represent what I wish to say: my being is not commensurate with the English language but I must render my ideas as clearly as I can into this language if any debate at all is to be possible. It is only through this rendering that I can make ideas clear to myself, let alone to others. In some strange way I know that I want to convey exists prior to my conceptualising it in language, and yet it is only through such translation that I am able to think at all: there remains a gap between what I want to say and what the language will let me say (or even think). Communication is therefore always defective. It involves a certain sense of alienation which is central to our nature as humans. We are divorced from immediacy, both from that of our own being, and from that of other people. Communication is neither what I am saying, nor what you are reading; it is what exists in the gap between utterance and reception. We can never understand anyone's meaning in its pristine state. When we read we are always transposing what is written into a framework that means something to us; we are translating the text into our own experience. Simply due to the fact of having been uttered or written down, a statement has already been translated and if there is a disjunction at the very root of individual communication, how much more is it accentuated when we try to communicate across cultures. Communication therefore is fundamentally a problem of translation.

In this respect, the role of the translator is analogous to that of the anthropologist: both are entrusted to interpret the experience of other cultures for those

who lack knowledge of them. This act of cultural interpretation is intensely problematic and contains numerous pitfalls.

Anthropology as Cultural Translation

Anthropologists may be resistant to the idea that they are nothing more than translators of culture, but this shows lack of understanding about the complexities of translation. This is shown by the odd view of Edwin Ardener that translation entails"entropy of the translated system - a total re-mapping of the other social space into entities of the translating one. At our destination the terrain would, however, be disappointingly familiar." Quoting this passage, Kirsten Hastrup says that were anthropology no more than translation, it would lead to a dead end in which cultural difference would vanish and this would be to ignore the complex problems that anthropology raises (Hastrup, 1995: 23). Yet translation theory for a long time has been concerned precisely with anthropological and cross-cultural issues, and it is only the very naive who believe that translation can, or should be, a mere transcription of meaning from one language to another. Far from entailing any entropy, the best translations contain an intensification of meaning in which: "all capture calls for subsequent compensation; utterance solicits response, exogamy and endogamy are mechanisms of equalizing transfer" (Steiner, 1975: 319).

Whether one is translating from a foreign language or from a foreign culture, the fundamental problems are the same. Literary translation is not a matter of simply relaying information from one context to another; it is also a process of the transmission of knowledge and the responsibilities and demands are similar to those that face the anthropologist who seeks to engage with another culture. Translation is equally concerned with cultural difference and the problems involved in maintaining a balance between meanings across different cultures involved in translation are analogous with anthropological enquiry. The translator needs to be involved in an intimate way with the other culture, must penetrate the secrets of its language in order to present its ideas in an intelligible form in another context.

As a matter of learning to live another form of life and speak another kind of language, the translator, like the anthropologist, needs to reflect on cultural differences in evaluating the material at hand. Equally, the difficulties of approach are identical. On the one hand is the view that thought is common to all and there are universal qualities that can be transmitted from one context to another and that the aim should be to make different experiences of the world intelligible to others. The opposite view is that experiences are incommensurate and it is the experience rather than the explanation of

difference that provides the rationale for translating from one context to another.

In this respect, the 'basic error of translation,' as pinpointed by Rudolf Pannwitz, could equally be applied to anthropology. Pannwitz saw this as lying in preserving "the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language. It is not generally realised to what extent this is possible, to what extent any language can be transformed" (Quoted in Benjamin, 1996: 260). This could stand equally well as the basic error of the anthropologist. It brings attention to the fact that translation, if it is to be effective, will always involve an aspect of anthropological understanding, as the practice of anthropology itself must entail an engagement with the problematic of translation.

The Nature of Translation

A translation seems to be something simple: it does no more than convey a meaning from one context to another. And yet, it raises complex issues. In some languages, the idea of translation is linked with that of 'betrayal' and this association retains an echo in contemporary debates. It can be a betrayal both of one's own language and that of the other.

In what sense can this be so? What or who is the translator betraying? This involves a double aspect: it is first of all a betrayal of the purity of one's own language. By bringing the foreign element into the new language, the translator allows the imported tongue to infect and even transform it. It is also an abuse of hospitality, and may even be considered a theft: the translator steals from the other language, bringing back elements to be used to enrich one's own language. These two senses appear contradictory. How can be both a reduction and an enrichment of the language? This contradiction turns on the central dilemma translation involves: it is a contradiction only in appearance. In reality it is a question of perception. It is the sin that lies at the heart of the legend of the Tower of Babel.

Still perhaps the most vivid example of the translator in this role is the case of La Malinche, the Aztec mistress of Cortez who acted as the essential go-between for the Conquistador conquest of Mexico. Against the general view that she betrayed indigenous values, Tzvetan Todorov argues the opposite side of the coin:

> ...as the first example, and thereby the symbol, of the crossbreeding of cultures; she thereby heralds the modern state of Mexico and beyond that, the present state of us

all... La Malinche glorifies mixture to the detriment of purity - Aztec or Spanish - and the role of the intermediary. She does not simply submit to the other... she adopts the other's ideology and serves it in order to understand her own culture better... (even if 'understanding' here means 'destroying') (Todorov, 1984: 101).

The last phrase provides a sting in the tail. To make a judgment on La Malinche is to make a judgment on our own world: in condemning her we are condemning the world (our world) which she helped to make possible, for we cannot make an informed judgment on the Aztec empire. What would have happened had it been able to repel the Spanish invaders and maintain its cultural integrity? We cannot tell. Would European society have left the new world alone, and left Aztec supremacy in Mexico intact? What would the consequences have been? Would the modern sensibility have been possible? We know that Aztec society was a cruel one, but just how cruel and whether this justifies its destruction is beyond our level of understanding. In judging La Malinche positively, Todorov is giving an endorsement to understanding between cultures no matter what the cost. This is not necessarily to justify colonialism as such, but it is does imply that colonialism is better than a denial of communication across different cultures. As such it stands as a justification of processes of translation.

As Todorov recognises, the figure of La Malinche is resonant: she stands on a threshold between the modern sensibility, dedicated to outward communication, and that of 'traditional' society, whose mode of communication is primarily aimed at maintaining internal coherence. The difficulty for us, the recipients of the benefits or otherwise of her betrayal, is that, for good or ill, we cannot renounce the heritage that has followed.

This opens up a field of ambivalence. Two writers to whom this was a central issue have been the Peruvian Jose Martin Arguedas and the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Both felt that to write in the colonial language (Spanish and English respectively), was a betrayal of their own cultural values, and both sought to write in native languages (Quechua and Gikuyu respectively) in order to give their work a purer expression. If Ngũgĩ was satisfied with this solution, however, in the case of Arguedas - an anthropologist as well as a storyteller - it simply opened up further problems and led to tragedy, being a directly contributory factor in his suicide.

Even if we accept that translation is a process of betrayal, it is nonetheless difficult to deny that it is essential: any form of growth implies it. Without it, languages and cultures become stagnant or inward looking. Translation in this sense is not a luxury but a necessity and, if it is a form of treachery, it is one that is constantly repeated. Indeed, our very initiation into culture in itself is part of a process of

translation as a 'betrayal' - a betrayal of one's own self-singularity. In this sense, all communication involves betrayal and language itself may even be said to betray the elemental solitude of existence.

The paradox of all language lies in the breach with a self-sufficient world that life qua life represents, accompanied with the will to overcome that breach: by naming a stone we give it an identity, but this identity is provided by the one doing the naming. Stones become stones only by being translated into processes of human communication. In this sense, the way we name things is not so arbitrary as de Saussure asserted, for what is named becomes fixed in a particular language, which, at the very least, provides an inescapable cultural context. '*Une pierre*' is not the same thing as 'a stone', even if the referent is identical. To translate the French word '*pierre*' as 'stone' is to effect a displacement, no matter how slight: the name does not simply describe, it also adds something to what it is describing. 'Une pierre' can exist only in the French language. Language not only represents, it also expresses, as Benjamin put it, the 'linguistic being of things'. But this also implies that by translating what exists into language we are bringing the world within the frame of our will, subjecting it to human control. At the same time, language is a means to develop communication with the world.

Theories of Translation

What is the status and meaning of translation? Does it really do no more than transmit knowledge from one context into another?

Theories of translation seem to fall within three main categories. The first, and most basic (or naive), assumes that a correspondence or a passage from one language to another is possible. It judges translation on its descriptive qualities and the extent to which it has been able to convey meaning accurately from one context to another. Languages are presumed to be equivalent to one another and it is therefore possible for words and sentences (and concepts) to be matched across cultures and contexts. This is a form of translation which tends to be used in a business context or instruction manuals. It is rarely if ever appropriate to literary translation, which calls for a much greater involvement in the process that takes place when meaning is conveyed across cultures.

Literary translation, if it is to be successful, must consider context. The translator must engage with the circumstances surrounding the work in question. In this, the second type of translation, the translator is more of an interpreter who should seek to convey the author's original meaning by engaging with the text in an intense

way. In this case, the translator's aim is to allow the reader to experience what the original author intended to convey. The translator tries to get into the skin of the original and convey what the writer would have said had they been writing in the target language. This may mean doing some violence to the original text in order to make the meaning clear in the new language. The translator here is something of a go-between, acting to bring together the writer with the reader who is unable to understand the original. The primary consideration here is generally fluency, which is what publishers tend to demand in commissioning translations of books for publication: the text should read as though it was originally written in the target language. This aim of fluency has recently been strongly criticised by Lawrence Venuti as representing a dishonest approach that obscures difficulties of cultural difference.

The third, and most complex, form of translation is what may be called 'reinvention.' In this, the translator uses the original work as the basis but may re-create the text in a way that is not strictly bound to the original. In its highest form, such as Holderlin's translations of Pindar and Sophocles, this type of translation takes on a life of its own that may transcend that of the original. Within this rubric, translation may cover a wide spectrum, so that - at an extreme - we might even speak of James Joyce's Ulysses as a 'translation' of The Odyssey.

A fourth type of translation may also be put forward, although it shades into the third, as 'mediation'. Here an attempt is made to hold the two languages in tension so that the translation acts in a way to mediate between the original and the new language. The translator here does not try to make a text that reads as though it was written in the target language, but makes the reader aware to the fact that what they are is reading a translation; it is a translation that retains an echo of the original. This is in accordance with Walter Benjamin's view, which he defined as follows: "Translation" he says, "instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognisable as fragments of a greater whole" (Benjamin, 1996: 260). The purpose of such a translation is not to seek to communicate one meaning, but to express a complementariness of meaning that is found in different places. In addition the translator must recognise that in language there is always a residue that cannot be conveyed.

In thinking about theories of translation, it should be remembered that languages are not static and the same words do not always convey the same things, even within the same language. They are always evolving and changing form. A good translator constantly needs to be aware of these nuances and this protean form. It is not simply a matter of transposition therefore, but translation should strive, as Benjamin

argues, to establish an echo of the original that reverberates in the new language.

Translation is a discipline that calls, therefore, for an understanding of the complexity of the differences that exist, not only between different languages, but also between different cultures. Despite what is popularly believed, good translation does not emerge from bilingual capability. Being equally able in the two languages may even be a disadvantage. The most important quality for good translation is generally held to be recognition of the differences between the two languages. The person who is equally comfortable in two languages often has difficulties in distinguishing the particular qualities that are inherent to both. A good translator, on the other hand, needs to free himself from the form of the original and to be able to perceive the point at which the two languages correspond or differ. The crucial feature is to have a thorough understanding of the target language in order that the underlying sense of the original shines through; it is not enough to find an equivalence of the surface structures of one language, replacing those of one for those of another.

The Translation of Culture

We are all translators of culture from the moment we are born: in order to enter the social world that surrounds us, we need to translate its terms of reference into a framework that makes sense for us. Living as a human being involves a constant process of transforming what is strange and disorienting into something familiar, something we feel comfortable with.

This process is especially marked when we are brought face to face with the reality of other societies. Everything at first seems strange and threatening. We can respond to this strangeness either by turning our backs on the new situation and retreating into what is familiar: we try to re-create our old situation and block out the new. This is often the case with exile communities in which people confine their interactions to fellow exiles and engage with the greater society only when necessary. Or we can plunge into the new situation with gusto, taking the new values into ourselves and adjusting - even welcoming the challenge its presents us with.

Neither response is easy, however. All cultural accommodation comes at some psychic cost, and it is virtually never total: it is unlikely that we will ever feel as comfortable in our adopted culture as our hosts. How we respond to this situation is at the basis of how cultural translation is effected.

Still one of the more fascinating texts on the impact of cultural translation is Antonin Artaud's 'On the Balinese Theatre'. In it, Artaud recounts his experience of witnessing a performance of Balinese theatre in Paris in 1931. He responded to this

event with a sense of immediacy and recognition: it was theatre as he conceived it should be and which had been rendered ineffectual by the rationalism of Western theatre. By going beyond any sense of the strangeness of the exotic encounter to something more elemental, Artaud opens up the possibilities of cultural exchange as a process of negotiation. The impression Balinese theatre made on him also brings us back to discussion of the ways in which translation may be seen as a betrayal.

Artaud had consciously rejected his own culture. In viewing the Balinese performance he was seeking to go beyond traditional European ideas of what theatre should be in order to undermine the cultural values this embodied. In this sense, his attitude parallels that of La Malinche, but with this difference: if he was betraying his own culture, it was to one that was weaker and the only tangible impact it could have on French culture was to widen its horizons. In actuality, therefore, far from representing a betrayal of his own culture, he was serving it and it was more a 'betrayal' of Balinese theatre, in so far as he took no account of its cultural specificity. Did Artaud understand the Balinese theatre in the sense that the Balinese do? Of course not. How could he, having never lived in Bali or studied the culture? Yet the impact it had upon Artaud goes beyond such a localised response to feed into a universal aspiration in which both the Balinese performance and his own perception of it participate.

Artaud's text gives us a marvelous sense of how he responded to the otherness of Balinese theatre. He conveys his sense of encountering radical difference in recognition. In its immediacy, his experience touched on an elemental empathy that drew together his dissident view of his own cultural heritage with what was implicit in the cultural form of another.

That Artaud tells us nothing of significance about Balinese culture does not invalidate his response. If the Balinese remain absent in what he has written, he responds still to elements that were latent in their theatre and to which the Balinese themselves may not have appreciated, at least not on a conscious level. What he brought into French culture was an image of Bali that was not fictional, but embellished by his own sensibility. In this respect, he was seeking out the other as a means by which to challenge the identity of the same.

If Artaud's sudden encounter with Balinese culture was a shock that affected his whole sensibility, it represents, in heightened form, something of what we all experience when we travel or even encounter new people in everyday life. Although he was able to translate it into his own experience with a much greater immediacy than is usual, he was nevertheless able to give voice to what is experienced, to a greater or lesser extent - whether at a conscious or unconscious level - by all people who come into sudden contact with other cultural value systems.

The way in which he translated Balinese culture into his own terms represents one response to a confrontation with what is other. This relates to - and problematises - what Dingwaney and Maier see as the common purpose of translation and anthropological theory. Translation, they assert, involves "the creation of a complex tension. That is, translation, ideally, makes familiar and thereby accessible, what is confronted as alien, maintaining the familiar in the face of otherness without either sacrificing or appropriating difference. This means that the translator must have a foot in each of two worlds and be able to mediate self-consciously between them" (Dingwaney & Maier, 1995: 304). However, it might be said that this does no more than establish a starting point and one which immediately sets up a problematic, which is revealed more forcefully in translation theory than in anthropology: is such even-handedness possible or even desirable? Is all that is involved in achieving this a matter of strategy and making decisions about choices, inclusions and exclusions?

The translator shares with the anthropologist a will to bring the other's culture into proximity with one's own. There is often a sense that this is a vital matter, upon which the diversity of cultures depends. But what does such openness to diversity signify? It is an unusual attitude, rare in human history. Most societies refuse such communication with the other, seeing the latter as the enemy and fearing the contamination of translatability. It would not be a great concern to them if surrounding cultures were to vanish. Concern for the other emerges only from a perception of strength; it is possible only when we have reached a point at which we do not fear them, when we have reduced them to impotence. Our concern is wrapped up in terms of anxiety for cultural diversity. Yet in what ways would it matter for, say, the Bororo (or for any other culture), if it were to be written out of European culture, if there had been no anthropologists or translators to transcribe its ideas for a Western audience? Is such concern simply a matter of our bad faith, a reflection of our own sense of guilt? Does it really mean that the other culture has a genuine presence within our cultural framework, or do we simply seize what we find of value in them to enrich our own sensibility? This brings us back to Benjamin's idea of the translator as mediating between two cultures.

Someone who maintained the tension between two languages in a way that accords with Benjamin's ideal is Lafcadio Hearn. Western commentators often say that the reason the Japanese like Hearn is that he presents an idealised image, showing them the way they want to be seen by others. This suggests a certain superficiality; that he did no more than present a surface picture of Japanese society that was informed by nostalgia. But if I read Hearn, I do so not primarily because I want to learn anything about Japan, but because he reveals how Japanese culture enters into the English

language as a fragment of a higher form. Hearn's work 'shines' on the original with the sort of purity that Benjamin saw as being the aim of true translation. Hearn realised as well as anyone, I believe, how to "lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification" as Benjamin demanded. It is in this sense, I suspect, that the Japanese recognise the genius of Hearn, not as evoking an idealised image of themselves but as presenting an image of Japan that participates in a universal framework[1]. Hearn stands between languages, acting as a conduit from Japanese into English. This was facilitated by the fact that his own Japanese was poor and he had to rely on his wife and father-in-law for understanding of the source material. By imposing on him a need for collaboration it also forced him to recognise cultural difference. It enabled him to establish his study from below and engage in a real reciprocity. Rather than being written to incorporate Japanese ideas into English, in some ways Hearn's work is directed against the English language (see Hirakawa, 1992). In this way Hearn coaxes a relation between two cultures to reveal an echo of the two that reverberates beyond the confines of either a Japanese or English speaking culture. This responds to George Steiner's view that translation should make

"tangible the implication of a third, active presence. It will show the lineaments of that 'pure speech' which proceeds and underlies both languages. A genuine translation evokes the shadowy yet unmistakable contours of the coherent design which, after Babel, the jagged fragments of human speech broke off... That such fusion can exist, that it must, is proved by the fact that human beings mean the same things, that the human voice springs from the same hopes and fears, though different words are said" (Steiner, 1985: 67).

Nevertheless, it has also to be recognised that languages do not exist in a symmetrical relation with one another: one language is always stronger than the other and this obscures and may even obliterate the glimpse of this third presence. In the way he responded to Balinese theatre, Artaud disrupts the relation between French culture and the other, but still incorporates the latter into the frame of the former. Hearn's relation with Japanese culture is much more complex, but still his work tends to serve the needs of exoticism by presenting the Japanese in a particular way, something that is a snare of all forms of representation.

It is the realisation of how deep these snares are that causes Lawrence Venuti to question fluency and readability in translation and instead to call for dissonance, mediation and responsibility. As Venuti argues:

"...a fluent strategy performs a labour of acculturation which domesticates the foreign text, making it intelligible and even familiar to the target-language reader,

providing him or her with the narcissistic experience of recognising his or her own culture in a cultural other, enacting an imperialism that extends the dominion of transparency with other ideological discourses over another culture" (1995:5).

Fluency is the illusion of transparency that is rooted in the fact that the translator claims a sort of omniscience in respect of knowledge of the two languages, refusing to recognise his or her imperfections of understanding. A sense of dissonance becomes present when writers like Hearn or Artaud consciously direct their efforts against the values of the dominant target language. It may also emerge when an imperfection of understanding is acknowledged by the translator and actively engaged with. Often the best translations may be made by people who distance themselves from full understanding of the source language. The great translator of Japanese and Chinese literature, Arthur Waley, for instance, could speak neither language and refused the opportunity ever to visit East Asia. And, even if his knowledge of Chinese was rudimentary and tentative at best, it is said that Ezra Pound's translations are more effective that those of more respectable translators. But in this case, is he simply appropriating Chinese works for American culture? What does such translation mean for the original culture?

Translation as Cultural Appropriation

Consideration of translation centrally involves issues of power. It brings into play the relations between languages, especially in respect of the differential existing between them. What does it mean to translate from a weaker language into a stronger one or vice versa? How are we to define what we mean by 'stronger' languages? Venuti gives some interesting statistics that help to make this point clear.

In Italy 26% of books published are translations, the vast majority from English. To show that a substantial part of their lists are translations is seen as prestigious by Italian publishers and with literary publishers the proportion of translated texts issued is often between 50% and 90%. How different this is from the US or Britain! In the US, translation accounts for only 3.5% of published books; in Britain it is even less, just 2.5%.[2] Translation brings little prestige; in fact literary translation tends to be the preserve of small, non-commercial publishers and it is regarded as a worthy but rather foolhardy activity for publishers to undertake.

This differential is significant and, on the face of it, quite surprising: given the fact that English and American cultures are so strongly monolingual, might one not expect them to have a greater need for translations than countries in which people tend

to be able to speak several languages? Why should it be the opposite? Venuti draws the conclusion that Britain and the US are 'aggressively monolingual and culturally parochial.' Although he is probably right, it does not necessarily follow that a lack of translations is a sign of cultural parochialism: it may simply be a sign of greater discernment, a sign that only the best work - only that which worthy of translation - is translated. Indeed, in all likelihood this is so: what is translated into English is only the best, only what has been chosen, only what has a direct appeal to an English language audience.

In contrast, what is translated from English may be chosen for other reasons, since the English language in itself has a certain prestige value. What is mediocre in English therefore can pass easily into other languages, while only quality work is returned. In the process, Anglo-Saxon cultural values are imposed through language: what they export is what is sanctioned because of its British/American provenance; what they receive is sanctioned because it is what they have chosen. The result is that an unequal exchange is established, and British and American cultures are able to appropriate to their own needs the best of what other countries produce. It also involves something rather more than merely a cultural parochialism. More significant is that English becomes hegemonic, even taking the place of the universal: what is translated into English is established as a canon that contains a criterion of judgment. This linguistic imperialism certainly enriches the cultures served by the English language, although it may also ultimately have a crippling effect, for the English language - no matter how flexible it may be - is incapable of encompassing all meaning and is inevitably distorted to a perspective that privileges Anglo-Saxon cultural values and diminishes the possibilities for a genuine encounter with the other.

Already, this process is being inscribed throughout society. It is difficult for an English person to be aspire to the universal for the simple reason that it is already assumed to exist within the English language. It means that even today foreign languages are rarely taken seriously at school; if taught at all they tend to be regarded as subsidiary subjects, far less important than reading, writing or arithmetic. Generally they are merely an option at secondary school and are hardly ever taught in primary school. This reflects the fact that for the English, learning languages is a luxury. It is not, as it is for people from most other cultures who wish to take part in global communication, a necessity: English, it is often complacently pointed out to those who raise the issue, is spoken everywhere. There is an assumption that there is no need to learn other languages - everything worthwhile exists in English. Yet, translation is only an imperfect tool. It cannot compensate for direct knowledge of another language. Not to know an original language is to have an exclusion zone placed between oneself and

cultural understanding that is only partially breached by the availability of translations.

When there is such a disparity in the power of languages, is it possible for any translation into English today to involve the sort of purification that Benjamin called for? Is not any wish to see languages as fragments of a greater whole doomed to founder on the fact that English has obtained such disproportionate influence in the modern world that it subsumes the universal to itself?

We may consider this through the way in which anthropology has engaged with translation as a form of cross-cultural communication. Perhaps the most revealing example is to be found in the 'ethnopoetic' movement in American anthropology that was shaped in the seventies and retains a hold on US anthropology through Dennis Tedlock's editorship of *American Anthropologist*. This involves an assumption of the universality of poetic thought and the possibility of communication across cultures by means of a fundamental affinity. Superficially it recalls Benjamin's demand to see cultures as fragments of a greater whole[3]. What is missing, however, is any consideration of how the fragment that is the English language fits into the overall schema. The ethnopoetic idea is methodologically dubious due to the fact that it takes language to be transparent and assumes that - by means of sympathy and affinity through poetry - it is possible to overcome human difference: poets can communicate beyond the surface level of ordinary language.

Tedlock's translation of the *Popul Vuh* is good example of how these assumptions affect practice. It shows how little anthropologists have taken translation theory into account when approaching cultural difference. One looks in vain, in the long introduction, for any recognition of translation problems other than those of 'understanding' the text. Tedlock discusses how this requires extensive study of Mayan culture, consultation with natives and with other specialists and an accurate rendering into English. How far the latter has been achieved is impossible for the non-Mayan speaker to say, but what is apparent is that the idiom used is entirely American. Tedlock's translation provides a familiar context in which an American audience can feel comfortable, while adding a forced sense of archaism. The only feeling of strangeness is that of distance, giving a sense that these people existed far away from us, but nevertheless that their cultural values are still penetrable to us. There is no sense that this is a narrative originally written for an audience that had no conception of European culture or even any idea that Europe even existed, no sense that there may be things in it that are incommensurable to our understanding. On the contrary, in ersatz biblical language marked by a portentous tone, the translation emphasises the Popul Vuh's universal 'message,' stressing the parallels that exist between it and elements we are familiar with in the Western tradition, especially playing on the fact that this is the

Mayan 'Bible' (a designation in itself highly dubious). In evidence is a will to do as little violence as possible to the English language so as not to alienate the reader. But the result is that this assimilates the other to a familiar context that denies its own terms of reference. The overall sense is that the English language is capable of encompassing any meaning - from no matter how alien a context - within its framework. It is merely an instrument of universality. An 'other' voice does not come through and the other is reduced to the level of the same. The sense of dissonance we have discussed in relation to Artaud or Hearn is wholly absent.

Like the translator, the anthropologist invariably takes back to his own culture what is perceived as worthy of transmission. The ethnopoetic movement represents an often refreshing attempt to open up areas of communication between cultures, especially giving recognition to forms of oral communication that are crucial for many societies, and it is to be commended for taking the task of translation to be an anthropological one: if we are to understand another culture, we need to be able to understand their own words and texts. Through a naive theory of what translation involves, however, ethnopoetic advocates have confused the issue.

This is not confined to the ethnopoetics, which after all is a marginal movement within anthropology. Tedlock's failure to engage with the problematic of translation is not very different than any number of other anthropologists and he has at least made the effort to make available a major work of the native culture in an accessible form, rather than simply reporting on his own ethnographic experience. By its very nature, anthropology is concerned to break down the distance between cultures. Yet, despite a rigorous will to examine ethnocentric assumptions in a critical way, it still tends not to examine whether this may not itself encompass a will for dominance. It is for this reason that translation has wide implications for any relation we have with other people and especially for the possibility of anthropological understanding.

The necessity, in good translation, to feel the difference between languages is facilitated by a sense of distance. One thing that anthropology can learn from translation theory is that language provides a material gap between common understanding. In anthropological accounts, a sense of familiarity too often intrudes (anthropologists still have a tendency to speak of **their** people, to take their fieldwork as a providing a privileged standpoint for understanding of that culture). From this perspective, the anthropologist, as the translator of culture, at times may be said to be not so much someone who betrays the source culture as an invader who is sent to seek out the hidden riches of the foreign language and brings them back for the benefit of the home language.

Translation and anthropology share a will towards repairing the sin committed

by humanity in constructing the Tower of Babel, something they also share with the march of progress in modern society. In this respect, one has to question the issues involved in the conflict between the universal and the local, of the uniqueness of cultural values against the needs of multiculturalism, and the will not to see these as irreconcilable contradictions, issues that are the heart of our discourse. In particular, does all communication between cultures also involve an imperialistic impulse?

The legend of the Tower of Babel is resonant with themes of our relation with the other. In destroying the Tower, the aim of the god is to destroy human arrogance by confusing people through making them speak different languages. The crime is that of wishing to break down the otherness of the gods, making humans their equals. But it also serves to legitimate one culture over others: in the Hebrew version, the crime is imputed to the Babylonians, while the Jews retain the original, universal language and thus their link with the divine[4].

Mediating the Universal

If translation may embody an unconscious will towards linguistic imperialism, correlatively it can also partake of the desire to undermine structures of domination. Indeed, translation theory - along with interest in systematic language study - has its roots within Western culture in German romanticism. Representing in part a resolve to re-invigorate German identity, romanticism saw language as a key factor to be addressed. During the Enlightenment, the French language dominated European culture, effecting a linguistic imperialism that tended to integrate German culture into the absolutist claims made by French civilisation. To recover the German language was a vital task and translation had an essential role to play in making available great literary work in German. Many of the writers of the German 'renaissance' from Sturm und Drang to Romanticism were also translators, among them Schiller, Goethe, A.W. Schlegel, Tieck, Novalis and Holderlin. The reinvigoration of German culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is greatly indebted to translation, which effected a restoration of the German language to the universal, freeing it from the dominance of French.

It should be remembered that though German romanticism is often criticised for its nationalistic fervour, this was tied to a belief in the universal and the themes of local and universal were dialectically united in this discourse. For the romantics, the discovery of German identity was intimately tied in with recognition that it was one fragment within a universal culture. By enriching this fragment, they were opening up the way to a return to the whole. In this sense, the national character was imprinted on

language as, reciprocally, it bore the stamp of language in a general way. It did not seek to universalise language to German as the French Enlightenment or the current global use of English does.

This sense is especially noticeable in Holderlin. Like the creators of the Tower of Babel, Holderlin wanted to invade the space of the gods. Steiner marks this quest in these words:

"The poet brings his native tongue into the charged field of force of another language. He invades and seeks to break open the core of alien meaning. He annihilates his own ego in an attempt, both peremptory and utterly humble, to fuse with another presence. Having done so he cannot return intact to home ground" (1975: 349).

The idea of a universal, originating language, embodied in a single book, is present in several esoteric traditions and was given as a task for the modern poet by Mallarme. Yet, despite the suspicion in which such an idea if held by those who would advocate multiculturalism and support the diversity of cultures, it has tended to be attractive to precisely those writers (such as the Egyptian Jew Edmund Jabes or the Russian Velemir Khlebnikov) who are most concerned with the importance of tradition and identity.

Words have an inherent and precious power that must not be dissipated. Andre Breton once spoke of the world as being a "cryptogram we are called upon to decipher" and Holderlin viewed all writing as encapsulating a wish to transcribe hidden meanings. Khlebnikov, too, spoke of words as 'the living eyes of secrecy' (quoted by Steiner: 242), and they provide a means not merely for open communication, but also of exclusion. Cultural identity is protected by establishing a language that cannot be understood by outsiders or enemies. Even in terms of our own personal relationships, there is much we withhold from the majority of our acquaintances. We share our most intimate thoughts only with those we trust. Language, then, is not simply communication. Steiner's view that language embodies a secret - both an individual and a collective wisdom - that must be defended and maintained in dynamic form, and that it is not, contrary to what is generally believed, a common property of humans, is suggestive. Like knowledge of fire, knowledge of the word has to be protected: treated indiscriminately, both burn. And any form of translation is a potential divulging of this secret, a secret upon which the whole of human existence is based. As a human refusal to accept things as they are, language is symptomatic of a determination to found identity in dynamic relation with the world. Our identity is formed through the way in which we construct different relationships with others, in the choices we make about what to reveal to the other. Each human relation we have is the creation of a different

world. All communication, as Steiner says, "'interprets' between privacies" (1975: 207).

This takes us back to a new consideration of the issues surrounding the idea of translation as a betrayal, for the potential the translator has to be a traitor is founded in the same ambivalence as all betrayal: to what or to whom should one be loyal? The response to this question depends on the structure of correspondences upon which we found our identity. As a British citizen - an identity I cannot easily renounce - I am expected to place British interests above those of all other nations. Does this mean I must disregard the interests of all others, to advance the interests of my own in all circumstances? Today few people would consider this acceptable, if only for the reason that we need to recognise that we live in an interdependent world and our interests are not always separable from those of others. By stepping out of my own culture and engaging with another, in whatever way, I must necessarily balance the interests of each. I need to assume a responsibility towards the other - be it only in the sense of not abusing the hospitality offered.

In this sense, translation brings with it responsibility to both languages, and anyone who undertakes it must be prepared to seek out a true diction that maintains this double obligation in tension. This task has to be founded in recognition of the basic asymmetry between the languages and the fact that there is always a residue in any utterance that cannot be communicated. The lack that this double recognition reveals needs to be present in the form that the translation takes.

Lawrence Venuti advocates a strategy of 'resistancy' in response to the problems raised by translation. By this he means that the dominant discourse should be defied by the translator refusing the easy fluency it demands and instead bringing attention to the fact that great differences exist between languages. This is certainly legitimate but I'm not sure it goes far enough in redressing the balance, indeed it may also fall victim to the ideology of diversity that underpins ideas of globalisation. Rather than this resistance, any act of translation opens up a breach that brings with it a need for restitution, a recognition of the need for a reciprocity that opens up the target language to a gap within itself that the translated text opens up. This occurs when, as George Steiner states:

"The translation restores the equilibrium between itself and the original, between source-language and receptor-language, which had been disrupted by the translator's interpretive attack and appropriation. The paradigm of translation stays incomplete until reciprocity has been achieved, until the original has regained as much as it has lost" (1975: 416).

This marks it as an anthropological task and reveals how anthropological

enquiry needs to take it into account when considering cross-cultural communication. It brings attention to the fact that gaps always exist between different cultural formations and this has profound implications for any sort of interpretation that would seek to make the ideas of one society known in terms that make sense to the people of another culture. There is here an underlying mystery that is at the heart of all communication, and it is in this mystery that the secret of cultural difference is founded.

Notes

1. It should be remembered, too, that Hearn's work is directed not simply against European values, but also against the way in which the Japanese themselves were incorporating those values through modernisation. Hearn's reputation in Japan may be subject to controversy, but he remains perhaps a unique example of a foreign writer, writing in a foreign language, who is more highly regarded and critically discussed within the culture he wrote about than the one he wrote for.
2. Venuti notes that during 1988 and 1989, 3500 English books were published in Italian translation; between 1983 and 1989 only 294 Italian books were published in English. In his more recent books, Venuti gives other figures that reveal still more clearly the extent of the imbalance between different languages, using UNESCO figures for translations across the world between 1981 and 1984. The most translated language was English with 70,100 volumes, followed by Russian with 18,838 and French with 16,711. Translations from English seem to account for about 50% of all translated books (see Venuti, 1998: 160-1).
3 It also, perhaps more significantly, takes much inspiration from modernist poetics, notably those of Pound.
4 This myth is not unique to the Judaic tradition. Benjamin recounts the *Choctaw* version: in it the first people all spoke the *Choctaw* language. When they opened their eyes and saw the extent of the heavens, they were amazed and spoke excitedly to one another, deciding to build a hill to reach up into the sky. That night, the wind blew so hard that it destroyed the hill. Undeterred, they started work the next morning, but the same thing happened. The third night, the wind blew so hard that the hill came crashing down over the people themselves. It did not kill them, but had the effect of causing them to lose their common language: only a few now understood the *Choctaw* language. The others started to fight among themselves and dispersed across the country to form all the

different tribes. What is significant about this version, which seems to be based on the biblical legend, is that any element of fault is absent and the event itself is not displaced to another culture. The biblical legend, on the other hand, specifically emphasises Babylonian pride as the reason for the divine wrath. By so doing, it gives legitimacy to the idea of the Jews as the chosen people and, by extension, provides a platform for the universalistic imperialism based on the notion of salvation that will later come to characterise the Christian tradition. In Mexican legend there is also the myth of the giant *Xelhua* who wished to use the great pyramid of Cholula expressly to 'storm heaven.'

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